

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT TRAINING IN ZIMBABWE'S TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS: A REFLECTIVE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

This survey on Early Childhood Development (ECD) was carried out to establish the status of ECD training in tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe. It was part of pre-conference for ECD that took place in 2010 in Zambia. Questionnaires, observations and structured interviews were used to collect data hence a mixed methodologies approach was effectively used. The results revealed that since its inception in the mid 1990's, ECD training in Zimbabwe has developed considerably in nature and scope. However, remaining major challenges include limited leave of absence for infant teachers to upgrade themselves professionally and failure to attract male practitioners into ECD training. This was further compounded by high University fees, inadequate supply of material resources, limited local literature and published research studies in ECD and unregulated accreditation of paraprofessional training. This study also, identified opportunities in ECD training which include Government scholarships in accredited programmes, a responsive ECD policy framework, autonomy of universities to accredit programmes and development of a career path for ECD graduates at various levels. It concludes by recommending the need for further training focusing on accreditation of training for paraprofessionals, increased training capacity at all levels, coordinated funding for accredited training by NGOs irrespective of level and research and scholarship funding for higher training in tertiary institutions.

Keywords: Early Childhood Development; Paraprofessionals; Zimbabwe

INTRODUCTION

Soon after Zimbabwe's independence in 1980¹, a large number of play centres, crèches and playgroups were established in Zimbabwe. Initially the centres were organized under the auspices of the old Ministry of Women's Affairs and Community Development to provide custodial services for children while mothers engaged in community projects (Dozva, 2009). Hence day care centre caregivers were just picked from local communities regardless of their level of education or professional training. The government appointed Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) District Trainers to in-service some of these teachers who were already working in registered centres. The training was done in six phases each covering a period of two weeks; thereafter they were awarded certificates of attendance. However, the in-service training could not cover much ground. By 2000, 5770(26.9%) out of 21449 teachers were in-serviced (The National Action Plan, 2005). The low level of training was attributed to inadequate resources. While the Government through ECEC District Trainers had been offering

¹ Zimbabwe, a former British colony, gained its independence on 18th April 1980 after a prolonged armed struggle.

in-service training for teachers already working in centres, there was need to provide professional training for ECEC teachers.

Pre-service training of ECEC teachers had been largely offered by nongovernmental training institutions leading to the award of a three year Diploma in ECEC. At present three private colleges provide professional Teachers training for ECEC. The training covers a period of three years and students are awarded a Diploma in Early Childhood Education(The National Action Plan, 2005).

With the adoption of the National Early Childhood Education Policy in the 1990's, responsibility for the custodial centres was transferred to the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture leading to the practice of ECD changing from informal, basic child custodial services to a more regulated and professionalized model on international standards and best practices (UNESCO, 2005). This change was reinforced by the Presidential Commission on Education and Training which carried out extensive consultations with stakeholders into the status of Early Childhood Development (ECD) in Zimbabwe (Nziramasa, 1999). Findings indicated that many children did not have access to ECD which compromised their progress in development. Therefore, one of the Commission's recommendations called for measures to ensure increased access to ECD as an aspect of the national policy to improve the overall quality of education at primary level in Zimbabwe. Pursuant to this goal, the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture instituted a new policy requiring all primary schools to establish two ECD classes for 3 to 4 year olds (Class A) and 4 to 5 year olds(Class B) (Secretary's Circular 14: 2004). The implications of this policy meant that more personnel with requisite training were required to serve these children.

Before the policy became fully operational Seke Teachers College in consultation with the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education and the University of Zimbabwe initiated professional training for specialist ECD teachers at Diploma level in 2004. In Zimbabwe, this level of training is taken after successful completion of four years of secondary education (Ordinary level). Ten primary teachers' colleges² are at the moment offering the ECD Diploma in Education programme. The University of Zimbabwe also responded by developing a set of policy guidelines for colleges to develop ECD programmes at Diploma level (Guidelines on Early Childhood Development (ECD) in Primary Teachers' Colleges amended 2006 and 2010). In 2006, Seke Teachers' College also took the initiative to train paraprofessional³ ECD personnel, whose role cannot be underestimated since successful comprehensive ECD programmes cannot function without their services (Dyanda et al, 2006). However, training of these paraprofessionals is not accredited by the university.

Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Education (B.Ed ECE) started in 1995 at the University of Zimbabwe with an initial group of 30 students. Six students were later recruited into the very first Master of Education in Early Childhood Education (M.Ed ECE) programme in Zimbabwe in 2004 As of now there is a total of four (4) university undergraduate level programmes and one masters level programme offering ECD training in Zimbabwe. One

² In Zimbabwe teacher education including ECD training is done through teachers' colleges, which are associate colleges of the University of Zimbabwe (UZ). The Department of Teacher Education (DTE) at UZ supervises the colleges and certifies the students after successfully passing the final exams and practicum.

³ The role of paraprofessionals is to support college trained professionals who are in leadership role by giving health and nutrition services, taking assistant teacher duties, assisting in home based programmes and other general child care duties among others. (Dyanda, Mudukuti and Makoni 2006)

candidate who is currently employed by the Great Zimbabwe University is almost through with her doctoral studies with the University of Pretoria. Obviously this is an area where capacity building programmes are needed if sustainable ECD training across all levels in Zimbabwe can be assured in the short and long term. Against this background, it was the researchers' interest to establish the status of ECD training in tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe. The following research questions helped to guide the study.

METHODOLOGY

Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were employed to ensure triangulation and also get the best out of the student teachers and lecturers. Observations, interviews and structured Questionnaires employed in the research. A purposive sample of ten respondents per college and four per University was chosen. The respondents were drawn from the primary teachers colleges and Universities that offer ECD. Involving both lecturers and ECD students helped to get reliable information through cross – checking. The main instrument used for this study was a questionnaire which sought to elicit data on the number of ECD personnel trained to date and those who were still under training. Questionnaires were physically handed and collected. Structured interviews were also used and the interview guide based on the following questions was prepared to guide the research:

1. What are the strategic objectives of ECD training In Zimbabwe?
2. What achievements have been made in ECD Training in Zimbabwe?
3. What challenges and opportunities are being encountered in ECD training in Zimbabwe?
4. What recommendations can be put in place for further training?

The advantage of using a structured interview was its ability to provide important background information on participants/respondents whilst at the same time giving them an opportunity to express their views freely about ECD. This approach enabled the researchers to obtain and interpret experiences in their natural education settings (Neuman 2000). The researchers also felt that interviews were an important instrument if they were to access information about achievements, opportunities, challenges, as well as beliefs, knowledge and opinions on ECD. All interviews were recorded on tape and later transcribed in to text scripts. The sample was small but it took long time to transcribe and analyse the data. Emerging issues, views, and recurring patterns were then identified from the interview data.

FINDINGS

In analyzing the data collected, it was concluded that Zimbabwe's ECD training policies targeted a number of strategic national and institutional objectives related to the achievement of the Early Childhood Development parameters of the Millennium Development Goals, for improving access and equity in education. This is in conformity to the Education For All (EFA) Dakar Framework of Action (2000) Goal 1 which compels states to *expand and improve comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children....*(UNESCO, 2005: 93). The ECD programme has multiple objectives associated with its existence. These include the need for continued manpower development, developing skills in managing children, advocacy and protection for children among other objectives discussed hereunder.

Manpower Development

The main objective in ECD training is to meet manpower needs for Zimbabwean ECD programmes so as to realize the objectives of the Millennium Development Goals and achieve universal education. The ECD programme requires personnel that have the requisite knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to design, implement, monitor, assess and evaluate ECD programmes for various age groups from birth to 8 years.. Thus it focuses to equip students with knowledge of relevant theories, curriculum issues and model programmes applicable for the age group range 0-8 years as well as exploring and analyzing recent and historical models in child development theories for the purpose of setting up targeted programmes.

Development of Skills in Managing Children

The programme also targeted to develop in students skills in organizing and managing programmes for children 0-8 years. Students need to be equipped with relevant managerial, organizational and technical skills that enhance the smooth running of ECD programmes. These include areas such as leadership styles, administration, supervision, management and evaluation. Supervised practical experiences in ECD centres is compulsory in most of the programmes.

Acquisition of Conceptual Knowledge in Community Development

ECD is part of broader social organization and a link in community development is necessary. As part of universal education, it has to be taken seriously and one way of ensuring that is to equip students with knowledge and skills of dealing with adults involved in community based child care and development. Thus the programme targets on developing in students' knowledge and skills to work with communities, local government and voluntary organizations in providing needed care and support services to children and their families in a variety of contexts.

Children's Advocacy and Protection

Advocating for children's growth and development, children's rights and child protection at all times in line with the Conventions of the Rights of a Child (Detrick, Doek, & Cantwell, 1992), the Child Protection and Adoption Act (2001) has been its major objective as well. Students have to be sensitized to critical issues related to the legal framework and international standards of professionalized child care. Knowledge and awareness regarding ECD policy issues including among others, ownership of ECD programmes, the place for ECD in the community among others is of paramount importance. In the final analysis, ECD students need to be encouraged to familiarize themselves with the work of child oriented organizations such as Justice for Children, Child line, Save the Children UNICEF etc through practicum and internship experience.

Upgrading Infant Teachers

The ECD programme is also intended to upgrade preschool and infant school practitioners' knowledge and professional skills. The ECD programme is fairly new and is unlikely to provide all the needed training, without the involvement of the older generation of teachers, thus the need for this re-training.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Findings indicated that the professionalization of ECD training in Zimbabwe achieved some measure of success through its inclusion in teachers' colleges and in university education programmes. This saw additional major achievements in the development of ECD training such

as regularization of programmes and updating of relevant policies. Key achievements to date are exemplified by training of personnel, policy making, staff development and research.

Training of Personnel

Tables 1 and 2 show that although there is still a long way to go since its inception in the mid 1990's, ECD training profile for Zimbabwe has developed considerably in its nature and scope. Major highlights of the student and staff profile within ECD training in Zimbabwe are summarized on the basis of Tables 1 and 2 below:

Table 1. Number of Students Trained and Under Training by Level and Gender by June 2010

	Trained				Under training				Total
	Male	%	Female	%	Male	%	Female	%	
Para-professional	5	3.3	147	96.7	0		0	0%	152
Diploma	167	7.1	1024	43.4	160	6.8	1010	42.8	2361
BED	60	9.7	242	39.2	64	10.4	251	40.7	617
MED	0	0	6	31.6	3	15.8	10	52.6	19
Total	232	7.4	1419	45.1	227	7.2	1271	40.4	3149
% by gender	7.4		45.1		7.2		40.4		

In Table 1, the 10 colleges accredited to the University of Zimbabwe had an overall training capacity of around 2361 diploma students (74.9%) out of the 3149 who had gone through the various ECD training programmes. In addition, the colleges had also produced 152 non-university accredited paraprofessionals who constituted 4.8% of the overall total. At degree level, the Bachelor of Education Degree (B. Ed ECE) contributed around 20% with postgraduate training a negligible 0.6% of the total training capacity. The colleges are by virtue of their number admission producing the largest proportion in comparison to the more specialized university training, with obvious implications for future developments and capacity building.

In the same table, the proportion of those who were still under training in relation to those who had already completed training reveals a number of important capacity related issues. For example, a great leap is apparent in the overall figure of 3149 students trained (in the ten year period from 1995-2008) in proportion to the 1500 who were currently training across the board. This means that the then current training load represented just less than half of the overall training capacity (1498: 3149). This has some obvious implications for areas such as replacement of personnel affected by various factors of attrition including death, promotion, mobility, etc. The then current training capacity thus seemed to be very insufficient given that in Zimbabwe about half a million children are ready to enter the first grade every year (UNESCO, 2005) meaning that the actual policy need is for about 12 500 ECD teachers.

The analysis also showed that ECD training programmes are now available at various levels (from paraprofessional to post graduate) but training at the postgraduate level has lagged very far behind the other categories since the programme profile data yields an output of only 6 graduates produced with 13 who were still under training. One can therefore conclude that PhD level training for ECD in Zimbabwe is still fairly nonexistent. This situation is likely to continue given the constraints in the funding of tertiary education in general as a developing country. Strategy would thus point to expansion and qualitative development at lower levels with perhaps increased involvement in the tertiary sector.

Table 2. Qualifications Profile of ECD Lecturers by Gender and Training

Bachelors (93.7%)			Masters (5.2%)			Doctoral (1.05%)			Grand Total
Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
25	64	89	0	5	5	0	1	1	95
28.1%	71.9%	100%	0%	100%	100%	0%	100%	100%	

In Table 2. human resources profile, 93% (i.e. the majority) of ECD programme staff in all cases had attained undergraduate qualifications while the rest (masters and PhD) were at 1.05%. As also shown in the staffing table, the vast majority of the undergraduate degree qualified ECD staff are female at nearly 67.4%, with the males comprising 26.3% or close to half of the total. The picture however deteriorates tremendously for the males because they were actually no males at all with these qualifications at the next level which is an additional challenge.

In total, though not accredited, 152(4. 8% of the grand total of ECD personnel) paraprofessionals have gone through training. One thousand one hundred and ninety one(50.5% of diploma trainees) teachers have diplomas in ECD, while 1170(49.5%) were still under training, including six (6) Namibian students who were receiving in-service in ECD training. Most of the diploma graduates who have completed their diploma programme are now managing ECD centres, particularly those established in primary schools.

Three hundred and two (302) (48.9% of undergraduates of ECD personnel) now have undergraduate degrees in ECD while 315(51.1%) students were under training as of 2010. Some of the graduates are now manning ECD programmes in Teachers' Colleges while some are holding posts in Districts and Provinces as ECD District trainers and Education Officers within the Ministry of Education, Arts, Sport and Culture. Some have been absorbed by SADC countries such as South Africa, Botswana and Tanzania. Six ECD students got a post graduate qualification from the University of Zimbabwe and most of them are now lecturers in various Universities running ECD Programmes. Thirteen (13) post graduate trainees were still pursuing their MED ECD programmes as of 2010. ECD University programmes which started at the University of Zimbabwe in 1995 have expanded over the years to incorporate three other institutions, with one of them also having two (2) SADC students.

Policy Formulation and Research Activities

Various syllabi have been developed in different institutions to meet professional expectations of the job. All the approved college ECD syllabuses have gone through the University of Zimbabwe's mandated accreditation procedures. As of now Zimbabwe has clear-cut policies guiding ECD training, both at school and college levels, which was not the case ten or so years ago. These policies have been benchmarked against international standards in this area tailor made to the Zimbabwean situation. For example, in line with EFA Goal 1 Zimbabwe has mandated the formal inclusion of ECD Classes in primary schools(Education Act, 1996) (Statutory Instrument 106 of 2005) (Secretary's Circular 14 of 2004).

Although still in its infancy, research activities related to ECD have been instituted, especially since the inception of the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes at University level. As part of their training requirements, B.Ed. and M.Ed. ECD students have carried out research on child development issues. However, most of these studies have been thwarted by lack of adequate access to some of the latest journal publications. The appearance of a number of research articles on ECD training in a number of journal articles the past few years is evidence of

increased research. The number of master's dissertations published as of 2010 remains at 6 while no doctoral theses had been published yet. The lack of PhD work is an issue which needs to be addressed in the shortest possible time since it is strategic to the overall development of the ECD programme.

Opportunities and Challenges

The ECD programme has opened a whole new world of opportunities in the world of training. Firstly, it initiated the development of partnership between government, tertiary institutions and other stakeholders such as the private sector, NGO's and the UN in the provision of personnel, materials, and other resources needed in training. The University of Zimbabwe has always operated a nationwide quality assurance system in association with all teachers' colleges to ensure quality education. Thus through such partnerships it was possible to carry out such activities as the formulation and review of ECD syllabi, academic and teaching practice examining of ECD students and holding capacity building workshops for college ECD lecturers. The two Ministries of Education have also developed partnership with UNICEF to implement identified aspects of ECD programmes in teachers' colleges and hence activities such as piloting, scaling up and evaluation of the paraprofessional programme have been carried out. UNICEF also assisted in the development of teaching modules for paraprofessional programmes.

Some Non-Governmental Organisations VVOB (Belgian Organization for International Cooperation) and Save the Children (Norway) identified ECD training as an area of interest and thus partnered government to support ECD teachers' college personnel in activities such as conducting awareness workshops on mentoring, orphans and vulnerable children. The last opportunity is that the ECD programme is now enjoying recognition from neighbouring countries and hence six Namibian students have graduated from Seke Teachers College with Diplomas in ECD education. Such a feat only reinforces the development of the programme and these points to a possibility of its success going regional.

Other partnerships include Africa Capacity Building Fund (ACBF) and Zimbabwe Women Resources Centre Network (ZWRCN), which have provided scholarships to ECD students at Women's University in Africa while the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education is assisting students on teaching practice at the same university. However there is need for coordinated funding by NGOs for accredited programmes irrespective of level of training so that there is also no duplication of effort.

The government cadetship programme presented an added opportunity that was used to reduce the shortage of manpower in ECD. So far the cadetship sponsorship programme is open to students including ECD students in all teachers' colleges and universities. This can help boost national output in this particular area. ECD training programmes are now enabling students to develop their own career pathway right up to postgraduate level.

However, a number of challenges were identified by the programme. Firstly, ECD programmes are characterized by inadequate supply of material resources, personnel and key infrastructural facilities such as observation rooms, testing equipment, children's books and children's outdoor and indoor play equipment. These shortcomings have translated to inadequate supply of mentors in schools and this has meant that at times college and university ECD students are attached to paraprofessionals, something which presents administrative headaches and is professionally retrogressive. In such cases paraprofessionals feel threatened by the presence of the more knowledgeable students.

Another challenge is on the uptake of in-service courses. The uptake is slower since teachers need to take leave of absence from work and yet only a limited number is granted such a leave each year. A study leave would enable students to pay for their University fees since the current economic slowdown has made it very difficult for some university students to fund their own training. Probably the universities could also offer part-time programmes to attract a large number of applicants.

Thirdly, due to the fact that ECD is still in its infancy, there is a limited number of post graduate scholars in this sector. This implies a limited number of researches and consequently limited local literature and published articles in ECD especially at preschool level.. The internet is also of limited assistance because it lacks relevant Zimbabwean or African studies.

The status of paraprofessional ECD programmes in the colleges is still a major source of concern since they are not university accredited. This means that their content, training, qualifications, etc. are not subject to scrutiny or external review by university and other professional experts in the field, and as such are not professionally recognised. Hence those who go through paraprofessional training cannot be appointed classroom teachers but can only operate as aides, assistants, or adjuncts.

The last hurdle has been that of attracting males into the ECD sector. In the gender profile in Table 1 females outnumbered male trainees by 7.2 % to 40.4 % in training and 7.4% to 45.1% females who had already trained. At the same time, the system wide under representation of males is highlighted in the cohort (7.2% males who were still in training against 7.4% who had already trained). This could be due to traditional gender biases related to social views/attitudes about the teaching and caring profession (Nyandiyi-Bundy, 2000). Women have often been regarded as child minders and care givers and hence women dominate in primary education and nursing hopefully, this challenge will begin to ease as gradual social change catches up with educational and other professional fields.

CONCLUSION

Indeed ECD training has made great strides in Zimbabwe with tangible results since its inception. However as shown in this discussion challenges and gaps still plague ECD training in Zimbabwe, the most significant being limited capacity for postgraduate training level. The limitation of postgraduate specialists naturally has negatively affected the scope of university and college training and on research which all need academic and profound postgraduate training to meet international best practice standards. At the same time the pace of diploma training, in the college sector also needs to be accelerated if the overall manpower training objectives of the National ECD Policy Framework (Dyanda et al, 2006) are to be met effectively before 2015.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to fully meet the specific objectives in early childhood development and also to cater for the gaps identified, this study recommends that the various ECD training programmes at college and university be further supported in the following ways:

1. Regularisation of the ECD paraprofessional programme and development of career path for ECD accreditation modalities. Paraprofessionals could proceed to diploma level, if they meet the necessary requirements, and then to degree and post graduate level.

2. Increasing capacity in training and male participation at all levels so as to meet the required personnel to run the programmes.
3. Coordinated funding by NGOs for accredited programmes irrespective of level of training for the development of ECD programmes that meet important national and international standards. Funding particularly for establishing ECD Centres to service colleges, universities and other stakeholders is called for. This would help intensify production of indigenous research in ECD from a Zimbabwean perspective.. Scholarship funding is also called for particularly for post graduate programmes where production of personnel with more expertise is relatively low.

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